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ABSTRACT

An interactive video program, "The Screening Interview," has been developed at Miami University (Ohio) to help prepare college and university students for on-campus employment interviews with corporate recruiters. Within the context of the simulated interview situation provided by the program, students function as the alter ego of either the candidate or the recruiter as they review and evaluate five stages of the interview process: breaking the ice, answering questions, asking questions, closing the interview, and decision-making. The program focuses on appropriate verbal and nonverbal behavior and provides a rating profile of the student's interviewing skills. Much attention was given during the design process to the two components of the visual presentation--the videotaped action and electronic text frames. Among the conceptual and pedagogical advantages of blending interview content with technology are: (1) immediate visualization and application of theories to a realistic situation; (2) content material that will be held constant over a long period; (3) a high degree of student involvement; (4) ability to skip or review material as needed; and (5) elimination of necessity to bring students to a central location for instruction. Pilot testing of the program focused on both the affective and the cognitive dimensions. It was found that student reactions to the program experience were positive, and preliminary findings on the cognitive dimension support the effectiveness of the program in promoting learning. (MES)

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Teaching Employment Interview Skills through Interactive Video Instruction

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NCR InteracTV with Pioneer Videodisc Player

Level IV Videodisc using KSSR Author software

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Teaching Employment Interview Skills through Interactive Video Instruction

Many educators subscribe to the adage often attributed to Confuscious, "I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand." Indeed, it is generally believed that students retain about one-fourth of what they hear, one-half of what they see and hear, and about three-quarters of what they see, hear and do. Interactive video programs can actively encourage the student to keep seeing, hearing and doing. Retention is improved by leading the student through many problem solving situations and decision points. While the potential of this technology has been well documented, actual examples of its use in the social sciences at the higher education level are relatively difficult to find. The general purpose of this paper is to describe the application of interactive video technology to the teaching of employment interview skills in colleges and universities. To this end, production and education issues related to this project will be discussed.

Production Issues

Similar to any training effort, the production of the interactive video programs began with the identification of the target students, a needs assessment, concept development, learning objectives, and content outline. A workable script was devised with the help of a computer expert that was familiar with interactive authoring languages and a learning expert capable of transforming the topic concept into a lesson plan. The interview process seemed to suggest a structured, linear, sequential program experience for the student. The video script and computer programs were based on a flowchart that included such things as the video scenes, computer menus, decision points, branches, and loops. Yet the underlying programming and instructional design sequences captured in the videodisc depended on complex, non-sequential, and non-repetitive approaches.

Team Concept

As has been the case with similar projects in computer and video-based instruction, the development of collaborative working relationships among subject matter specialists, instructional designers, computer specialists, and video professionals is an essential element for a successful project. For videodisc projects, the collaboration is even more crucial, and the difficulty of finding common ground is more problematic, since interactive videodisc presentations depend on nonlinear, non-repetitive techniques.

These elements became most evident in the latter stages of project execution. Even with a well-designed authoring language, dedicated and talented computer programmers, and a persistent instructional designer, a very large number of error-filled video and text fragments had to be corrected. This discovery and correction process typically involved at least two and usually more team members. Errors included inaccurate video addresses, typographical errors on text screens, inappropriate or illegal branching by the program, abrupt transitions between scenes, and lapses in program logic. Since these problems cannot be identified until each of the components-subject matter, script, video, and authoring--are assembled and tested, inadequate project scheduling for error detection and correction

can cause missed deadlines. Beyond correcting the obvious logical and typographical errors, once the product is seen a a whole, individual elements such as continuity in screen design for text location, and consistency in language and syntax will require careful and detailed work to assure a smooth, functional interactive environment. While 90% of project time initially appears to be devoted to script, video, and authoring, in reality, at least 40% of project time was spent on the final 10% of the project overcoming programming problems, logical breaks in the instructional design, and in assuring visual and textual continuity.

Based upon initial consultations with interactive designer/trainers with AT&T Communications, General Electric, NCR and Procter & Gamble, an initial five member team concept was employed: project director, instructional designer, content designer, computer programming coordinator, and video producer/director. The complexity of the project required the adding of specialists in computer screen design/editing, and scoring/evaluation. Universities, by using campus personnel and students for parts of the job can produce teaching discs at a reasonable cost. There are many professionals on campus that can contribute the requisite resources. Collegiality can create the proper team climate necessary to complete a successful project. For example, while there were six principal people involved on an on-going basis, before the project was completed twenty-five other people, representing fifteen different campus units, became directly involved.

Project Director

Although the interactive video process requires a team effort at least one person must have a clear vision of what the final product will look like. That person should coordinate the project and follow through the entire process. The project director's biggest challenge was coordinating the communication among team members. Only through good team communication could the project succeed without being plagued by Murphy's Law. Even within the main project team, overcoming the "Tower of Babel" effect and finding a common language was difficult. For example, the term "evaluation" initially held a significantly different meaning for each the team members. In addition, another related communication challenge was simply finding a common time for team members from different units to meet. Although the project manager served on a part-time basis, he was able to focus on the day-to-day situations effectively because he was relieved of direct supervision of daily budgetary concerns by a senior university administrator.

Content/Instructional Design

The Screening Interview is designed to help prepare college and university students for on-campus employment interviews with corporate recruiters. Within the context of the simulated interview situation, students function as the alter ego of either the candidate or the recruiter reviewing and evaluating five stages of the interview process. The program focuses on appropriate verbal and nonverbal behavior, and provides a rating profile of the student's interviewing skills. The rating profile guides students to areas where additional study or preparation are recommended.

The simulations use the same videodisc but experiences are customized through the use of different computer programs that are on floppy disks. The floppy disks control the access points on the videodisc and text screens that appear during the simulation. For the Recruiter the simulation is built around the following five interview stages: breaking the ice, asking questions and verifying information, answering questions and promoting the company, closing the interview, and decision-making. The simulation is designed to increase competency in areas such as: phrasing questions, processing information, probing for additional information, answering questions, and applying equal employment opportunity guidelines.

For the Candidate the simulation is built around the following five interview stages: breaking the ice, answering questions, asking questions, closing the interview and decision-making (by participating in this stage which is a required activity of the recruiter, the student shall gain an empathic understanding that will help him/her in the role of interviewee).

Within each version the student has two options as to how s/he may wish to process the simulation. The "Minimum Feedback" format takes about 25 minutes to complete the first four interview stages and is recommended to the experienced or advanced student. It involves viewing a scene and responding to prompts. The program automatically takes you to the next scene and prompt without a full critique or rationale. At the end of the complete simulation (first four stages), the student receives an overall score and a performance profile.

The "Continuous Critique" format takes about 45 minutes to complete the first four interview stages and is recommended for the student with minimal interviewing knowledge/experience. Immediately after student responses, a verbal feedback/rationale together with a video scene demonstrating a satisfactory response is shown if needed.

In the fifth stage, Decision-Making, the student has the opportunity to evaluate the candidate (from the recruiter's perspective) using the accompanying evaluation form and observation notation form. Company description, job description and requirements, and candidate resume data are included with the simulation package. Upon completion of this stage, the correct entries for the evaluation form are displayed on the screen. The student then self-scores the evaluation.

Visual Design

The best idea and most carefully worked out plan for a videodisc can be undone in no time if the visual presentation on the disc is thoughtlessy executed. Therefore, a careful plan was made for the design of the two components of the visual presentation; the videotaped action and the electronic text frames. These two components had to be made visually compatible because viewers were going to move back and forth from video to text and sometimes would look at both simultaneously. The colors chosen for each component were complementary. The people and objects in the videotape were arranged so that there would be room in the picture for the clear overlay of text when needed. Also, careful attention was given to making sure information in the text referred correctly to information in the video. People's names and positions were identified properly and the appropriate tense was used when the viewer

was asked to consider an event that s/he has just seen or one that would occur in the future.

Writing evaluative/feedback text to be read from a CRT screen presents special challenges. The following measures were used and found to successfully aid clarity and readability. The length of each line of text was kept to forty spaces. Each paragraph contained one or two sentences. Each sentence tried to convey just one idea as simply and directly as possible. Short paragraphs made the frames easier to read. Paragraphs were kept down to three or four lines to allow for more space to be incorporated into the frames. Sentence structure was kept simple. Action verbs were used whenever possible instead of adjectives and adverbs. Double spaces were used between paragraphs. All text was left justified with a ragged right edge. Upper and lower case letters were used to increase readability.

Some advertising layouts work well as aides to organizing information on a computer screen. Grids are also helpful. A picture window layout, consisting of a white window centered on a black background, was chosen for the text frames for The Screening Interview. The window frame added balance and unity to the text presentation and pushed the text out toward the viewer. The color of the border of the window changed, corresponding to the color of the touch screen panel pushed by the student as s/he enters a decision/ reaction regarding the interviewer or interviewee's behavior. The colors of the touch panels were chosen because of anticipated stereotyped/ergonomic responses to them. For example, blue for satisfactory, red for needs improvement, green for probe for additional information, and yellow for no probe. Highlighting, in the color of the window frame, was used to emphasize significant words in the text frames.

Information that is aesthetically pleasing tends to be more comfortable to work with. To maximize student interaction and minimize computer phobia touch screen technology was used. At all decision points the student has the option to exit the system. It was found that the pressure of the evaluative messages were lessened to some extent by making the visual presentation comfortable, readable and clear for the student.

Education Issues

The impetus of the program came from the realization that students often find it difficult to see the application of theory (situational variables, verbal and nonverbal variables, roles, perception, and feedback) to communication skill development in an applied context like interviewing. The use of interactive video systems for teaching interviewing skills allows for the immediate visualization and application of theories to a realistic situation. Interviewing is especially well-suited for application to a self-paced interactive technology because it is visually oriented and allows the student to see the theory in action.

The content area is also appropriate because the material will be held constant over a long period of time and administered to many people on an irregular schedule. The disc does not wear out and can be used virtually indefinitely. Minor modifications can be made inexpensively by computer reprogramming, even though the disc itself cannot be changed. In addition, students can come to a career planning office or classroom at a time that is personally meaningful (typically before participating in actual interviews).

This high degree of student involvement combined with the program's ability to adjust to the student by skipping material that is already known or reviewing segments that are more difficult to understand often enhances and accelerates learning. This sense of freedom and control heightens student interest and attitudes toward the content of the program.

Interactive programs eliminate the necessity to bring groups of students to a central location for instruction. The programs allow for individualization to student needs while still insuring a "standardized" presentation at multiple locations and different times.

This method is particularly useful to institutions wanting to train many students at different campuses in a short efficient time interval. Once a disc is mastered, it is relatively inexpensive to reproduce copies. Amortizing the fixed costs over many discs reduces the overall cost per student. The technology is, therefore, less appropriate for applications that have small numbers of students or for material that must be updated in a short time interval.

The program can be used as an adjunct to other teaching methods. Beyond training, interactive video allows students to be involved in simulated testing or diagnosis. The simulations can be thought of as vivid and extended case studies that they can be used for training, diagnosis and evaluation.

Evaluation

Pilot testing of the program by students focused on affective and cognitive evaluative dimensions. Student reactions yielded positive feelings and attitudes toward the program experience. Because interactive videodisc systems are so new, field testing focused on both an introduction to the technology as well as an assessment of the usefulness of the videodisc for training interviewers and interviewees. It was often difficult to distinguish satisfaction with the program from curiosity about the technology itself. Since interactive videodisc is one of those "window" technologies--those who see it for the first time inevitably think of dozens of applications to their own particular area of interest and experience--it is possible that field testing may be confounded by fascination with questions about how the technology works, rather than if or why it works in the particular application being tested. Nevertheless, preliminary findings on the cognitive dimension support the effectiveness in promoting learning for the content portion of the program. Student scores do vary positively with their pre-program experience and improve as time spent with the program increases.

Summary

This paper discussed the production issues and educational issues encountered in the creation of an interactive video for the human communication field. Key production issues included the team concept, project director role, content/instructional design and visual design. Conceptual and pedagogical advantages of blending interview content with the technology and an evaluation of the effort were discussed as educational issues. In conclusion, interactive video is now affordable and applicable for a variety of training situations. Application opportunities for this new technology are limitless. It is the learning method of choice when learner control, branching, computer control and rapid random access are desirable.